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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST VOWS TO CARRY ON
DEPITE ATTACK

REF: KYIV 989

Classified By: Acting PolCouns Robert Scott for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Comment: Dmytro Groisman, a prominent Ukrainian human rights activist, told Emboff on June 12 that he had recovered fully from a beating by unknown assailants on May 23 (reftel). He suspected that he was attacked because of his public criticism of Ukraine's State Penal Department (SPD), which is responsible for running what he called a closed, corrupt, and violent prison system. He concluded that only independent monitoring could address the problem in prisons and that the Humans Rights Ombudsman, Nina Karpachova, criticized by most human rights groups, had made reasonable efforts but was hamstrung by limited resources and the lack of a clear legislative mandate.

[1](#)2. (C) Groisman has been a fearless critic of the government in the past and he appeared to be fully recovered and undeterred by this attack. His claims of abuses in the prison system are credible and we intend to follow this issue closely. Although his positive assessment of the Ombudsman's work is at odds with many of his peers, his contention that many of Karpachova's critics have become too focused on personal disagreements seems correct. End Summary and Comment.

Recovered from Attack, Will Continue Work

[1](#)3. (C) Dmytro Groisman, a prominent Ukrainian human rights activist, told Emboffs on June 12 that he had recovered fully from an attack by unknown assailants on May 23 (reftel). He suspected that he was targeted for his highly critical statements about Ukraine's State Penal Department. He confirmed press reports that he was attacked after coming home late at night by a stranger, who first asked him to confirm his identity. When Groisman replied, the man assaulted him and was quickly joined by another man waiting outside. Groisman estimated the beating lasted a minute and he believed that they only intended to scare him because they could have easily inflicted more serious injuries. Groisman, who did not recognize either of the men, later determined that one of them came to his home a few days before the attack posing as a relative of a prisoner. His family, accustomed to strangers asking for assistance with human rights issues, inadvertently provided the attackers with details of Groisman's schedule. He said it was the first time he was assaulted since beginning his work in 1993, but that he was determined to continue advocating for human rights. He seemed dismissive of police promises that they would soon identify the attackers.

Highlights Prison Abuses

[1](#)4. (C) Groisman described his efforts to highlight abuses

in prisons operated by the SPD, which he characterized as closed, corrupt, and violent. He estimated that 3-5 percent of prisoners were beaten regularly by other prisoners, with the approval of prison authorities, to maintain order and silence potential complaints. He said that more than 90 percent of prisons used "slave labor", forcing prisoners to produce products sold at a profit by prisons. He said many prison officials profited from this labor and that attorneys assigned to prisons by the Prosecutor General's Office to observe the rights of prisoners had been corrupted and had become part of the problem. Contrary to other human rights advocates in Ukraine, Groisman believed that conditions in prisons are worse than in pretrial detention facilities and police temporary holding facilities because the short term facilities are more accessible by NGOs as well as the detainees' families and defense lawyers. He said prisons holding convicted criminals were the least accessible to monitoring.

15. (C) Groisman felt that the government was obligated to provide independent monitoring of prisons and access to free legal counseling for prisoners who wish to file complaints. He said that the office of the Human Rights Commissioner, currently headed by Ombudsman Nina Karpachova, was not set up to address everyday problems faced by most prisoners, but was intended to intervene in extraordinary cases. Acknowledging that his views of Karpachova differed from most of his peers, Groisman described good working relations with her and was generally positive about her work. He felt that too many human rights groups had personalized their criticism of Karpachova while the real problem remained the lack of resources and an effective legislative mandate for the Ombudsman's office. Groisman described incidents involving

complaints from prisons in Vinnytsya and Lviv Oblasts, which he had made public. In both cases, the SPD denied the allegations, but in private Karpachova confided that her office confirmed most of the allegations and had taken corrective actions. He claimed that she asked Groisman to stay silent about her findings and follow up to see if the problems had been addressed. Groisman, who confided that it was personally difficult to not respond to the SPD denials, kept silent and later was able to confirm that conditions in these prisons had improved, as claimed by Karpachova.

16. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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